

SSC Student Spotlight

Olivia Wells & Taylor McClure



Two recent Seminole State College graduates recently returned from an eight-day service-learning based study abroad trip to the Dominican Republic.

Taylor McClure of Tecumseh and Olivia Wells of Ada joined students from other community colleges across Oklahoma to participate in a study abroad experience organized by institution members of the Oklahoma Association of Community Colleges (OACC). EF College Study Tours served as the travel provider.

During the trip, the group worked with the Mariposa Foundation, an organization devoted to educating and empowering adolescent girls in an effort to end generational poverty. The organization was founded in 2009 by volunteers looking for community-based solutions to help young girls, specifically within the Dominican Republic.

This was the first time for both McClure and Wells to visit a developing country.

“It was pretty eye-opening. But, even though they don’t have a lot, they are so grateful there,” said McClure. She went on to explain that most homes there did not have doors or even foundations – they were built directly on the ground.

McClure explained that in the Dominican Republic, education is offered until eighth grade. “Because most families cannot afford school after that, many girls as young as 13 go on to be married and have children. This program offers them an alternative,” she said, adding that the Mariposa program offers many complementary classes, including math, science, reading and arts.

McClure and Wells, along with other participating community college students, worked with a group of 30 girls, ages 6-12. In the mornings, the students spent time dancing, playing baseball and hoola-hooping with the girls. After lunch, the group helped clean classrooms and participated in various maintenance projects within the Mariposa Center.

Wells explained that the students were also given free time during their trip. “Along with working with the Mariposa Foundation, I enjoyed the free time we had to experience the people and their culture,” she said. Wells had the opportunity to visit the beach, along with many shops in the area.

Both students mentioned the language barrier they encountered while working with the girls. “Many of them didn’t speak English. We had to work on our Spanish and learn simple words to help us communicate,” explained McClure.

The two agreed they would both love to return to the Dominican Republic to work with the Mariposa program again. “I’m really considering going back for a whole semester, maybe after I graduate. I will need to brush up on my Spanish before then, though,” stated Wells.

McClure and Wells both graduated from SSC in May. McClure will attend the University of Oklahoma this fall to study health and exercise science. Wells plans to attend Randall University in Moore to study psychology.

The OACC Service Learning & Leadership Development program and EF College Study Tours believe that by working directly with communities in the Dominican Republic, students will develop cultural empathy and awareness through firsthand engagement in areas such as poverty, equality and public health.

This service-learning project aims to help students gain critical thinking and leadership skills and motivate them to make a difference and implement change within their own communities. As part of the program, students returning from the Dominican Republic are encouraged to engage in a local community service project in order to give back to local Oklahoma communities.

For more information about the program, please contact SSC Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. Bill Knowles by phone at 405-382-9272 or by email at b.knowles@sscok.edu.